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ST. BESSARION, BISHOP OF SMOLYAN

WHOSE MEMORY THE HOLY CHURCH COMMEMORATES ON THE 29TH OF JULY

Thy heavens, O land of Bulgaria, are ablaze! Thy sapphire-clear, pure heavens burn with the wounds of the yoke! Blood drips from the heavens and the moan of slaves echos from the Rhodopes. Souls are heavy with despondency. Hearts are rent by fear and suffering. We cry out like Jeremiah: "Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us; consider, and behold our reproach. Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens. We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows... We gat our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the Rhodopian wilderness. Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine. They ravished our women in the holy places, and the maids before the altars of God. Princes are hanged up by their hands: the faces of elders were not honored... Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time? (Cf. Lamentations, Ch. 5)

Very little is known of St. Bessarion, apart from the account of his martyrdom. From old manuscripts preserved to this day we learn some details concerning the penetration of the Osmanian invaders into the outskirts of the Rhodopes. The chief source for this knowledge is the important *Notebook of History*, in which were inscribed significant episodes from the conquest of the Krustova Gora region. It was written by several men, mainly priests, dominated by Hieromonk Gregory, who came into this province from Mount Athos. The monks Urban and his comrades fortified the spirit of the local population, inspiring in them faith and hope. Some of them added their notes to Hieromonk Gregory's record. The original has been lost, but a transcript is still in existence.

During the reign of Sultan Machmoud IV, in the month of July of the year 1669 A.D., the terrible and forcible islamisation of the Smolyan region took place. The Turks did great mischief, forcibly converting some of the inhabitants, slaughtering others, and driving others away into the forests. They burnt the Church of Saints Peter

and Paul, the Metropolitanate, and the school of theology. They turned the divine books into ashes. They plundered the treasures, and demolished the holy things. A black night lay over the Bulgarian land.

The Turks wanted to capture Bishop Bessarion of Smolyan (whose name in the world was Vitan; he was born in a village near the town of Plovdiv). But the bishop, together with a huge group of Bulgarians, managed to escape one night. They settled in the hamlet of Raikovo ("of Eden"). Many other Bulgarians from the neighboring villages had taken refuge there also.

Yet, the voice of the birds was not utterly silenced. Like a nightingale in the twilight, like a heavenly bird amidst the wilds of the forests, from within the hearts of the rocks, Bishop Bessarion of Smolyan raised his sweet voice, the saintly nightingale, whose very name betokened his feat — for "Bessarion" means "of the forest".

Bessarion, the bird of the forest, soothed with the words of his songs the souls of the banished faithful lambkins of Christ; Bessarion, the Rhodopian falcon undaunted by the unapproachable cliffs of the Rhodopes; Bessarion, the turtle-dove of the forest, which found a nest in the footstool of God's feet, in the divers caves and wilds of the Rhodopes, whence prayers go up as pure incense towards the heavenly altars of the All-High God; Bessarion, the good shepherd — May he be glorified today by all the faithful!

But what hymns should we offer, what candles should we light before the face of our enlightened father, intercessor and guide towards the Light. Open your ears, ye Rhodopian rocks, and hear the song of the falcon of our land, the sylvan eagle, vigilant even unto this day, over the indomitable fortress — the Orthodox Church — the holy spiritual mother of our people, the honor and glory of the Bulgarian land!

At the time when Smolyan and its environs were islamised, the Turks slaughtered many men, women and children who would not accept the

faith of Mohammed. Many widows and orphans of both sexes, who could not escape to Raikovo, were compelled to spend the night in the forests, starved and hungry for sleep. Many of these were captured by the Turkish hordes and subjected to all kinds of squalid deeds, which only the benighted Turk can do. I cannot describe these squalid deeds — my jaws are benumbed. But bright days shall come for this tortured Bulgarian people. May it know to what a state of immorality the Turkish invaders have fallen, and what a barbarian religion they have been spreading.

During the reign of Machmoud IV, in the month of July of the salvatory year 1669 A.D., the enslavers crawled over the Rhodope-mountain and did great mischief to the Christians there. Among the fugitives was also the Bishop of Smolyan, the praise-worthy Bessarion, who, like an angel, guardian of the sweetness of Eden, took refuge in the hamlet of Raikovo ("of Eden"), where with the fiery sword of his words he kept the filthy hands of the Hagarenes off the hearts of his faithful sheep. The shepherd of the people was always surrounded by many Bulgarians from the neighboring villages. Sheltered under the wings of their guardian, they abode joyously in their holy Christian Faith.

For a year the lamp of the Rhodopes remained in Raikovo. However, the hater of light sought a way to extinguish its radiant flame in order to bring to an end his baleful plans. Because for the hapless and overgrieved Bulgarians, Bessarion was an eagle-wing; whilst he sojourned in their midst, the turbans and yashmaks wallowed contemptible in the sacks at the squares. This made the Hagarene rancor more and more virulent.

In the early dawn of the 29th of July in the year 1670 A.D., the saintly Bishop Bessarion, together with ten guardians, all on horses and well armed, took the road from Dolno Ezerovo ("the lower village of the lake") towards Gorno Ezerovo ("the higher village of the lake"). But suddenly, in the dale, a group of armed Turks fell upon them. After a long and bloody fight, the Turks captured alive the Bishop and his guardians: Momchil Glouhovski, Ghegho Souharski, Naiden

Grivninski, Detcho Rouganski, Belko the Bear-keeper, Strahil Boitchev, Groudyou Grunchovski, Vulko Gruzdanski, Stoiko Mirchovski and Raicho Raev. They disarmed them, tied their hands at the back, and hurried with them towards Smolyan, lest a band of Christians should catch up with them, set the captives free and fiercely revenge them. God's finger was pointing towards Golgotha. The time had come for the faithful servant of Christ to be glorified. And instead of reaching Gorno Ezerovo ("the higher village of the lake"), the praise-worthy Bessarion was preparing to pass to the higher lakes of the never-ceasing heavenly mirth, where there is neither pain nor darkness, but Christ is all in all.

Having reached Smolyan, the local governors ordered that Bessarion be offered the chance to accept Islam in a mild way and thus keep his temporal life. The sly Hagarenes hoped, in this way, to wheedle the rest of the Bulgarians, who had remained faithful to Christ, into the pernicious Mohammedan faith, thus revenging their previous steadfastness.

But the holy hierarch answered gently: "A man who loves the Divine Truth is unfaltering in his faith. My death will make me immortal before God."

Then the Turks disrobed him, leaving him completely nude, and started tweaking his body with some specially prepared pincers, tearing pieces of living flesh from his body. The Bishop endured fearlessly these infernal pangs and did not beg for his life. The blood streamed out of the body of this genuine martyr. Afterwards, they beat him all over his body in a most cruel way with iron rods, till the holy hierarch closed his eyes and lost consciousness. Having brought him round, the Turks began stabbing him with knives, cutting pieces from his body. Then they put a glowing kettle on his head and jeered at him. Yet even this was not enough for them. They mortified him before all the people, leading him around the town completely naked for show. The bishop swallowed this insult with humility. In the end, a frenzied Turk stepped out of the throng and thrust a sharp dagger into his breast. The rabid Turks then threw

themselves upon him, beating him with stones, disfiguring him, and hashing his body into a mess.

The Turks commanded the Bishop's guardians to dig a grave in an orchard, near the village-green of Smolyan, where they buried his holy relics. Thus on the 29th of July 1670 was the holy Bishop Bessarion of Smolyan martyred, in his own see city. His memory today illumines all the land of Bulgaria. With songs and brilliant words let us glorify the sylvan bird, the most wondrous Bessarion, praising jubilantly his valiant temper and his great steadfastness in the Faith.

Compiled and translated from the Bulgarian by Brother Petko

Sources:

1. *Lives of Bulgarian Saints*: compilation by Bishop Parthenii of Leucia, published by the Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in 1979, vol. II, pp. 88-89; the original text style is preserved in the contemporary Bulgarian version

2. *Bulgarian Saints in the Fine Arts*, by Anghel Vassiliev, Sofia 1987, p.173.

3. *The Rhodopes through the Ages*, a historical chrestomathy, Sofia 1966, pp. 28-31. The names of the guardians are taken from this edition of the historical record of St. Bessarion's Martyrdom.

ON LOVE FOR ONE'S PERSECUTORS

"For He too, so far from hating," so He speaks, "even pours benefits on those who insult Him." Yet surely in no respect is the case parallel, not only because of the surpassing nature of His benefits, but also by reason of the excellence of His dignity. For thou indeed art despised by thy fellow-slave, but He by His slave, who hath also received ten thousand benefits from Him: and thou indeed givest words, in praying for him, but He, deeds, very great and marvellous, kindling the sun, and giving the annual showers. "Nevertheless, even so I grant thee to be mine equal, in such wise as it is possible for a man so to be." Hate not then the man who doeth thee wrong, who is procuring for thee such good things, and bringing thee to so great honor. Curse not him who uses thee spitefully; for so hast thou undergone the labor, but art deprived of the fruit; thou wilt bear the loss, but lose the reward; which is of the utmost folly, having borne the more grievous, not to bear what is less than it. "But how," saith one, "is it possible for this to take place?" Having seen God become man, and descend so far, and suffer so much for thy sake, dost thou still inquire and doubt, how it is possible to forgive thy fellow-servants their injuriousness? Hearest thou not Him on the cross, saying, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do?" Hearest thou not Paul, when he saith, "He who is gone up on high, and is sitting on the right hand intercedeth for us?" Seest thou not that even after the cross, and after He had been

received up, He sent the apostles unto the Jews who had slain Him, to bring them His ten thousand blessings, and this, though they were to suffer ten thousand terrors at their hands? But hast thou been greatly wronged? Nay, what hast thou endured like thy Lord, bound, beaten with whips, with rods, spit upon by servants, enduring death, and that death, which is of all deaths the most shameful, after ten thousand favors shown? And even if thou hast been greatly wronged, for this very cause most of all do thou do him good, that thou mayest both make thine own crown more glorious, and set thy brother free from the worst infirmity. For so too the physicians, when they are kicked, and shamefully handled by the insane, then most of all pity them, and take measures for their perfect cure, knowing that the insult comes of the extremity of their disease. Now I bid thee too have the same mind touching them who are plotting against thee, and do thou so treat them who are injuring thee. For it is they above all who are diseased; it is they who are undergoing all the violence. Deliver him then from this grievous contumely, and grant him to let go his anger, and set him free from that grievous demon, wrath. Yea, for if we see persons possessed by devils, we weep for them; we do not seek to be ourselves also possessed.

— St. John Chrysostom
Homilies on St. Matthew, Homily XVIII

THE 29TH DAY OF THE MONTH OF JULY
COMMEMORATION OF THE HOLY HIEROMARTYR
BESSARION OF SMOLYAN

AT LITTLE VESPERS

On "Lord I have cried..." , 4 stichera, in Tone I: Spec. Mel.: "Joy of the ranks of heaven..."—

With love let us praise the warrior of the King of heaven, the persistent advocate for mortals, who broke the bonds of earthly slavery and received the twofold heavenly crown of a martyr and holy hierarch. *Twice*

Heavenly radiance is poured forth upon the land of Bulgaria today; the angelic choirs harmonize in hymns with those on earth; and together we pour forth praises unto him who did not allow his steps to wander from the path of truth.

Ignorant of that which is heavenly, the Moslems buried thy relics in the ground; yet even though thou art hidden, look down from heaven upon thy people, and make steadfast those who keep the Faith unsullied on earth, for thou art the helper of our Orthodox land.

Glory..., in the same tone—

"Heavenly things did I speak unto you on the mountain, my children, but, being wont to lust after the things of earth, ye were deceived like the Moslems. Forsake these things and the desire therefor, that your hearts may be uplifted, lest ye fall away from the holy promises received by the Orthodox people at baptism: for ye are Christ's," the sacred Bessarion saith unto us.

Now & ever...: Theotokion, in the same tone—

Joy of the ranks of heaven, and mighty intercession for men on earth, O all-pure Theotokos: Save us who have recourse unto thee, for on thee, after God, have we set our hope, O Theotokos.

At the aposticha, these stichera, in Tone II: Spec. Mel.: "O house of Ephratha..."—

O holy house of Christ, O Orthodox people, chant ye a holy hymn unto the newly revealed Bessarion, the hieromartyr of the Bulgarian race.

Stichos: The righteous man shall flourish like a palm-tree, and like a cedar in Lebanon shall he be multiplied.

Having wandered in the mountains of Rhodope, O all-wondrous one, thou didst attain unto the house of heaven, and dost illumine our hearts with beams therefrom as with a lamp.

Stichos: They that are planted in the house of the Lord, in the courts of our God shall they blossom forth.

Of old, the land of Bulgaria was the house of Christ, but now, trampled underfoot by foreigners, it lamenteth and crieth out through the lips of the faithful: Help and have mercy on us, O new martyrs of our race!

Glory..., in Tone IV—

By the shedding of thy blood and the mockery of the wicked, O father Bessarion, thou wast piously shown to be a fountain of miracles and the glory of the faithful who cry unto thee: From the bonds of sin free those who glorify thee with faith!

Now & ever...: Theotokion—

Mercifully regard the supplications of thy servants, O all-immaculate one, quelling the uprisings of the cruel demons against us, delivering us from every sorrow; for thee alone have we as a steadfast and sure confirmation, and we have acquired thine intercession; let not us who call upon thee be put to shame, O Mistress. Haste thou to answer the entreaty of those who cry out to thee with faith: Rejoice, thou help, joy and protection of all, and salvation of our souls!

Troparion of the hieromartyr, in Tone IV—

Today we celebrate the memory of the luminary of our land and praise the wondrous passion-bearer, for he put the mindless Moslems to shame and established the faithful in piety. And, joining chorus now, we all cry out unto him: Rejoice, O Bessarion our father, who prayest for the Bulgarian people!

Glory..., Now & ever...: Theotokion—

The mystery hidden from before the ages and unknown even to the angels, through thee, O

Theotokos, hath been revealed to those on earth: God incarnate in unconfused union, Who willingly accepted the Cross for our sake and, thereby raising up the first-formed man, hath saved our souls from death.

AT GREAT VESPERS

After the Introductory Psalm, we chant "Blessed is the Man..." , the first antiphon.

On "Lord I have cried..." , 8 stichera, in Tone IV—

Today the angels rejoice in heaven, and the land of Bulgaria joineth chorus in this memorial of the blessed Bessarion. O ye faithful, let us hasten with love to his temple, and offer up supplication to our helper and father; for he beareth our entreaty unto Christ, and like as a hen sheltereth her chicks, so by his care doth he protect his children from every evil.

Twice

"If a man loveth divine Truth, he remaineth unshaken in the Faith," thou didst say unto thy rabid tormentors, O right wondrous Bessarion our father; and having won a wreath for thy lawful struggles, thou madest thine abode in the bridal-chamber of Christ, where thou prayest for us, O helper of the Bulgarian race. *Twice*

Having truly made thy soul the bride of Christ God, O all-wise father, thou didst remain faithful to Him unto the end. And thou wast shown to be a beacon shining rich rays upon our land, and didst sprinkle it with thy precious blood. Wherefore, O sacred father Bessarion, we cry out to thee in thanksgiving: Rejoice, O exalted star! *Twice*

Lo! the sacred time hath come! Rejoice, O land of Bulgaria! For in latter times a new sun hath dawned upon thee, a new star hath appeared in the sky of the Church: the blessed Bessarion, the lamb of God and emulator of the ancient martyrs. Wherefore, O right laudable one, grant thy blessing unto those who fall down before thee, by thy supplications delivering us from all misfortunes and perils. *Twice*

Glory..., in Tone VI—

Before thy martyrdom, O wise one, with godly admonitions thou didst cure thy children's lack of faith, and didst establish thy beloved flock in

Orthodoxy; wherefore, O Bessarion our father, by thy supplications do thou likewise cure the lack of faith in these times, and in that thou art good, bring the lost under the protection of the Church.

Now & ever...: Dogmatic theotokion, in the same tone—

Who doth not call thee blessed, O all-holy Virgin? Who will not hymn thine all-pure birthgiving? For the only-begotten Son Who shone forth timelessly from the Father came forth, ineffably incarnate, from thee, the pure one; and being God by nature, He became man for our sake, not divided into two Persons, but known in two natures without confusion. Him do thou beseech, O pure and most blessed one, that our souls find mercy!

Entrance. Prokimenon of the day. Three readings:

READING FROM THE PROPHECY OF ISAIAH

Thus saith the Lord: All the nations are gathered together, and princes shall be gathered out of them. Who will declare these things, or who will declare to you things from the beginning? Let them bring forth their witnesses, and be justified; and let them hear, and declare the truth. Be ye My witnesses, and I too am a witness, saith the Lord God, and My servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know, and believe, and understand that I am He; before Me there was no other God, and after Me there shall be none. I am God; and beside Me there is no Savior. I have declared, and have saved; I have reproached, and there was no strange god among you. Ye are My witnesses, and I am the Lord God, even from the beginning; and there is none that can deliver out of My hands. I will work, and who shall turn it back? Thus saith the Lord God Who redeemeth you, the Holy One of Israel.

READING FROM THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON

The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure is taken for misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction: but they are in peace. For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality. And having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly rewarded: for

God proved them, and found them worthy for Himself. As gold in the furnace hath He tried them and received them as a burnt offering. And in the time of their visitation they shall shine, and run to and fro like sparks among the stubble. They shall judge the nations, and have dominion over the people, and their Lord shall reign forever. They that put their trust in Him shall understand the truth: and such as be faithful in love shall abide with Him: for grace and mercy is to His saints, and He hath care for His elect.

READING FROM THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON

Though the righteous be prevented with death, yet shall he be in rest. For honorable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the gray hair unto men, and an unspotted life is old age. He pleased God, and was beloved of Him: so that living among sinners he was translated. Yea, speedily was he taken away, lest that wickedness should alter his understanding, or deceit beguile his soul. For the bewitching of naughtiness doth obscure things that are honest; and the wandering of concupiscence doth undermine the simple mind. He, being made perfect in a short time, fulfilled a long time; for his soul pleased the Lord: therefore hasted He to take him away from among the wicked. This the people saw, and understood not, neither laid they up this in their minds, that His grace and mercy is with His saints, and that He hath respect unto His chosen.

At Litia, these stichera, in Tone I—

O ye faithful, with splendor let us praise the glorious Bessarion today, for like a radiant star he hath shone forth upon those who languish in darkness. And let us cry out to him as to our good father: O hieromartyr, mercifully regard the sufferings of thy people, for whose slavery thou didst pray in the days of the Moslem yoke, pouring forth tears unto Christ for us, for amid many sins we are perishing like the heathen in unbelief and error: but thou art the consoler of the suffering and the bold helper of the sorrowful.

Passing through the fire of great torments, like gold thou wast purified of all unrighteousness; and having confessed the name of Christ with valor, thou hast received from Him a never-fading wreath. Wherefore, leave us not orphans, O right wondrous father Bessarion, but entreat Christ God with fervor, that He remit the sins of those who cry unto thee: Rejoice, sure protector of the city of Smolyan and advocate for our souls!

O all-glorious new-martyrs of the Mountains of Rhodope, the evil Moslems drove you from the earth, yet were unable to take away your Faith. They destroyed your bodies, and thereby adorned your souls with incorruption; for, finding you hidden in the mountains and defiles, they slaughtered you like lambs. But ye stand now before Christ like the angels, unceasingly praying with Bessarion your pastor, for your suffering children.

The shepherd was attacked, yet the sheep did not scatter; for faithfully emulating their father, the all-wondrous Bessarion, the sheep of Christ spurned the wolf Mohammed, manfully endured tortures at the hands of his evil servants, and, joining chorus, received the kingdom promised them from before time began. Wherefore, we earnestly fall down and cry out to them as our helpers: Turn not away from us sinners, O our fathers and mothers! Succor your children!

Strengthening thy children in the Faith with goodly discourse, O father, thou didst also provide them with a model of piety by thy deeds, and by the rending of thy flesh and thy grievous sufferings, and by the power of the most Holy Spirit thou didst set at nought the wiles of the Moslems, and didst show the zeal of the tormentors to be of no avail. Wherefore, we celebrate thy memorial now with splendor and humbly ask thine aid.

Submitting to God thy Savior, thy steps did not stray from the path of Truth; wherefore, having received strength from Christ, thou didst joyfully cry out to the Almighty with the beatings of thy heart: "Who is so great a god as our God, Who hath smitten those who assail me in vain and hath broken the teeth of the Moslems?"

Glory... in Tone VIII—

Thou didst abide in those things which thou hadst learned, O blessed Bessarion, champion of piety, and in being driven forth and suffering didst follow the teaching and long-suffering of the apostles of old, whose worthy disciple thou wast shown to be; for with thy shepherd's staff thou didst drive off the ravening wolves, laying down thy life for thy sheep. How, then, can we fail now to flee to thee earnestly, O helper of our race, and ask thy fervent intercession for all who honor thee?

Now & ever...: Theotokion—

O most pure Theotokos, we hymn thee, the Mediatrix for our race, and we call upon thy name with faith. Put down the arrogance of the heathens who lay snares for us, set at nought the blasphemies of infidels and heretics, and visit thy suffering people with mercy, for thou, O Queen of heaven, canst do all things soever thou desirest.

At the aposticha, these stichera, in Tone IV—

Today the whole world giveth utterance to thy glory in church, and the Church Militant celebrateth with that of heaven. The clergy of the faithful praise thee as the valiant warrior of Christ and a long-suffering confessor of the true Faith, O father Bessarion. O sacred and all-wondrous leader, entreat the one God—the Father, Son and Spirit—that we all may be saved.

Stichos: The righteous man shall flourish like a palm-tree, and like a cedar in Lebanon shall he be multiplied.

Unto Bessarion, the invincible athlete, the divinely-wise leader, the comforter of the suffering, the giver of joy to the sorrowful, the good father who hath not forsaken his children amid grievous circumstances, with one mouth, O ye faithful, let us cry out with love: Help us, O father, when the judgment shall come upon us, and with thine omophorion shield those who love thee from righteous wrath.

Stichos: They that are planted in the house of the Lord, in the courts of our God shall they blossom forth.

Feeding thy suffering people with words of incorruptible life, O father Bessarion, and sanctifying the Mountains of Rhodope with the drops of thy blood, thou didst undertake a splendid ascent to the bridal-chamber on high. Lift up our hearts from things corruptible by the effulgence thereof.

Glory... in Tone VI—

This is a day of joy and sorrow: of joy, for we hymn and glorify thee, O hieromartyr of the Bulgarian race, in that thou didst appear as an unshakable pillar of the Church of Christ during the centuries of slavery, and didst render thy flock steadfast in the Faith; of sorrow, for the nations now rage, and the heretics devise evils against the Lord Christ and His Church, and the land of Bulgaria, falling away from its Savior, is not mindful of its blessings.

Now & ever...: Theotokion—

Christ the Lord, my Creator and Deliverer, Who came forth from thy womb, O all-pure one, and robed Himself in me, hath freed Adam from the curse. Wherefore, like the angel do we unceasingly cry out to thee, O most pure one, who art truly the Mother of God and Virgin: Rejoice! Rejoice, O Mistress, thou intercession, protection and salvation for our souls!

After the blessing of the loaves, the troparion of the hieromartyr, in Tone IV—

Today we celebrate the memory of the luminary of our land and praise the wondrous passion-bearer, for he put the mindless Moslems to shame and established the faithful in piety. And, joining chorus now, we all cry out unto him: Rejoice, O Bessarion our father, who prayest for the Bulgarian people! *Twice*

And "Virgin Theotokos, rejoice!...", once.

AT MATINS

At "God is the Lord...", the troparion of the hieromartyr, twice; Glory..., Now & ever...: The resurrectional theotokion, in the same tone.

After the first chanting of the Psalter, this sessional hymn, in Tone V—

O Lord our God, we are too humiliated and ashamed to lift our faces to Thee, for our iniquities have been multiplied more than the sands of the sea. We now entreat Thee, our Father in the heavens, through the supplications of all the new-martyrs of our race: Take pity on us, guide us to salvation, and grant us the strength to reach the place of Thy holiness.

Glory..., Now & ever...: Theotokion—

O Theotokos, thou art truly the Mother of our God. Deliver us from the enemies of our souls; forget us not utterly in the multitude of our sins; grant life to our souls; melt thou our hearts unto repentance, that we may cry unto thee: Rejoice, O most merciful one, thou helper and aid of those who have recourse to thee with faith!

After the second chanting of the Psalter, this sessional hymn, in Tone II—

Wherefore are we, who are oppressed, despondent over a multitude of tribulations? For we have Bessarion, the shepherd of Smolyan, the sacred luminary and martyr of our race, as a comforter amid perils, who with the divinely suffering choir of the new-martyrs of Bulgaria ever entreateth Christ God fervently, that we all may be saved.

Glory..., Now & ever...: Theotokion—

Why do the waves of the passions disquiet us, O most immaculate Virgin who gavest birth unto Christ the Helmsman? Thee do we now beseech: Protect, help and preserve the faithful, and with the right laudable Bessarion entreat the only greatly merciful God, that we all may be saved.

Polyeleos, and this magnification—

We magnify thee, O holy hieromartyr Bessarion, and we reverence thine honored sufferings, which thou didst endure for Christ.

Selected Psalm verses—

A Our God is refuge and strength [Ps. 45: 2]

B A helper in afflictions which mightily befall us.
[Ps. 45: 2]

A Therefore shall we not fear when the earth be shaken. [Ps. 45: 3]

B O God, who shall be likened unto Thee? Be Thou not silent, neither be still, O God.
[Ps. 82: 2]

A For behold, Thine enemies have made a noise, and they that hate Thee have lifted up their heads. [Ps. 82: 3]

B Against Thy people have they taken wicked counsel, and have conspired against Thy saints.
[Ps. 82: 4]

A They have made the dead bodies of Thy servants to be food for the birds of heaven.
[Ps. 78: 2]

B The flesh of Thy saints for the beasts of the earth. [Ps. 78: 2]

A They have poured out their blood like water.
[Ps. 78: 3]

B For Thy sake we are slain all the day long.
[Ps. 43: 23]

A We are counted as sheep for the slaughter.
[Ps. 43: 23]

B Thou hast made us a byword among the nations. [Ps. 43: 15]

A And I became a man scourged all the day long.
[Ps. 72: 14]

B By fire hast Thou tried us even as silver is tried by fire. [Ps. 65: 11]

A We went through fire and water, and Thou didst bring us out into refreshment. [Ps. 65: 12]

B Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous.
[Ps. 31: 11]

A For the Lord is in the generation of the righteous. [Ps. 13: 5]

B And their inheritance shall be for ever.
[Ps. 36: 18]

A The righteous cried, and the Lord heard them.
[Ps. 33: 18]

B A light hath dawned forth for the righteous man, and gladness for the upright of heart.
[Ps. 96: 11]

- A In everlasting remembrance shall the righteous be. [Ps. 111: 6]
 B In the saints that are in His earth hath the Lord been wondrous; He hath wrought all His desires in them. [Ps. 15: 3]
 A Wondrous is God in His saints, the God of Israel. [Ps. 67: 36]
 B The righteous man shall flourish like a palm tree, and like a cedar in Lebanon shall he be multiplied. [Ps. 91: 13]
 A The righteous man shall be glad in the Lord, and shall hope in Him. [Ps. 63: 11]
 B And all the upright in heart shall be praised. [Ps. 63: 11]
 Glory..., Now & ever... Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, glory to Thee, O God. Thrice

After the polyeleos, this sessional hymn, in Tone VIII—

With the fragrant grass of the teaching of the Gospel thou didst lovingly nurture the hungry reason-endowed sheep in the wilderness of Rhodope, O holy one, and didst comfort those disquieted by doubts; wherefore, as thou art in heaven, thou dost entreat Christ unceasingly in behalf of thy children, O thou who carest for the Bulgarian race, Bessarion of valiant resolve.

Now & ever...: Theotokion—

Unto thee, O Virgin Theotokos, star of golden radiance, who shone forth the Sun of righteousness upon the benighted world, do we flee, weeping tears. Merchants from among the nations labor to corrupt thy people, and we, in despondency, do nought that is good. O good one, turn not thy face away from us, the unworthy! Have mercy and save us, O greatly merciful divine Maiden!

Song of Ascents, the first antiphon of Tone IV.

Prokimenon, in Tone IV—

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.

Stichos: What shall I render unto the Lord for all that He hath rendered unto me?

Let every breath praise the Lord.

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW, §38

The Lord said to His disciples: "Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father Who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father Who is in heaven. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be those of his own household. He who loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he who loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me. He who findeth his life shall lose it: and he who loseth his life for My sake shall find it.

After Psalm 50, this sticheron, in Tone VI—

When the malicious Hagarenes sought to turn the Christ-loving people of Bulgaria to their false religion, the holy hierarch Bessarion stood forth with manly resolve, everywhere strengthening his flock against the blandishments and violence of the enemies of Christ, urging them to withstand torments, abuse and oppression, that, by confessing the Holy Trinity to the end, they might duly inherit the kingdom on high and all the blessings which the Lord hath promised to His true servants. Then did the Moslems like ravening wolves fall upon the chief shepherd and slaughter him without pity, that they might scatter the Orthodox sheep and devour them. But the grace bestowed upon the holy hieromartyr preserved them in the true Faith. Wherefore, have mercy on us, O Savior, and protect us through the supplications of Thy favored one.

Canon of the holy hieromartyr, in Tone V—
 ODE I

Irmos: Bringing battles to naught with His upraised arm, Christ hath overthrown horse and rider in the Red Sea, and hath saved Israel, who chanteth a hymn of victory.

O Bessarion our father, who carest for the flock of Smolyan, sure helper of our race before the throne of the All-holy Trinity: Render bold the supplications of those who celebrate thy memory with love, that we may hymn thy struggle with joy.

God appointed thee shepherd, that with the staff of piety thou mightest tend the sheep entrusted to thee; and thou didst not wish to leave even one of them to be torn apart by the noetic wolves, and for their sake wast thyself torn asunder.

Thou didst suffer for Him Who for our sake became incarnate, and hast adorned the choir of hieromartyrs in heaven, showing thyself now to be our spiritual confirmation and the protector and intercessor for the whole land of Bulgaria, O right wondrous father Bessarion.

Theotokion: O fiery noetic chariot, who bore God the Word in thy womb, earnestly entreat Him that thy servants be saved who have recourse unto thee, and who now, in thy temple, chant a hymn of victory unto the hieromartyr of the Bulgarian race.

ODE III

Irmos: O Christ Who by Thy command fixed the earth upon naught and suspended its weight unsupported: establish Thou Thy Church upon the immovable rock of Thy commandments, O Thou Who alone art good and lovest mankind.

Amid the dark night of five centuries of suffering, O greatly merciful Christ, Thou didst not reject the lamentations of Thy servants amid their enslavement, but, setting the new-martyrs of Bulgaria afire, Thou didst cause the brave-minded Bessarion to shine forth among them like a star of surpassing brilliance.

Today hades roareth forth, and the world danceth with it; but, taking refuge in the serene temple of Bessarion, we fall down before his icon and, weeping, cry out: By thy supplications, O our good father, save from misfortunes all who honor thy memory with love.

The nations raged against Christ and His Church, as David said; yet now the world joineth chorus yet more. The Church of Christ hath not perished utterly, and thy children are confirmed in

Orthodoxy, having thee as a faithful mediator in heaven, O Bessarion our father, with all the new-martyrs of the Bulgarian race.

Theotokion: O Virgin Theotokos, thou radiant cloud who lettest fall upon men the Rain of heaven: With the celestially flowing water of thy grace quench thou the fiery passions of those who pray to thee.

Sessional hymn, in Tone V—

In thy days was the prophecy of Isaiah fulfilled, O father Bessarion: Men fled to thy land, and they who were gathered in the groves of Rhodope fell by the sword, their families made captive and their wives vilely used. Yet now, a new slavery, worse than the Moslems', hath arisen: for the demons go roaring about the streets, causing the faithful to fall into delusion, and leading many to perdition. Wherefore, we fervently entreat thee as a guide of piety and comforter of the sorrowful: Never cease to pray for thy people, as a sacred pastor and much-suffering martyr.

Glory... in the same tone—

Weep, ye leaders of the nations opposed to God! Lament, ye false prophets of the new Baal! For, lo! the Church of God, even though persecuted and hated by the multitude of infidels, hath been established firmly forever upon Christ the rock, and shall endure until the end of time. With the light of confession it disperseth the darkness of false belief through the multitude of the supplications of and intercessions of the new-martyrs. For they shine upon us rays of Orthodoxy in the midst of a depraved and most wicked people.

Now & ever...: Theotokion—

Behold, as Isaiah prophesied of old, that the earth shall be corrupted with corruption and spoiled with spoliation, so now hath the land of Bulgaria been corrupted, if not utterly, and it hath wept. Wherefore, O Queen of heaven, mercifully regard thy wretched people, and leave us not to perish utterly, but by the judgments which thou knowest, preserve us, for the despairing people have no other helper than thee.

ODE IV

Irmos: Perceiving Thy divine condescension prophetically, O Christ, Habbakuk cried out to Thee with trembling; Thou art come for the salvation of Thy people, to save Thine anointed ones!

O father Bessarion, deliver our souls from all pride, and as much-enduring warrior of the Truth and a confounder of all the wiles of the devil, rescue us from the midst of the lions' whelps who seek to devour the lambs of Christ.

Making thine abode in the trackless wilderness, thou didst wander the Mountains of Rhodope, and didst endure a multitude of tribulations; O all-glorious luminary; and therein having dyed a robe of purple for thyself in thy blood, thou didst soar aloft to heaven.

There is no health in our race from head to toe, for we have angered our holy Lord and have all found ourselves to be useless. Yet by thy supplications incline Christ, the most merciful Savior, to have pity on thy servants, O helper of the land of Bulgaria.

Theotokion: In multifarious ways have we embittered Christ by our thoughts, words and deed, O Virgin, and we fear His dread judgment; but going before us, by thy supplications deliver us from a grievous end, as the most hymned Mediatrix of the Christian race.

ODE V

Irmos: O Thou Who art clothed in light as with a garment: I rise at dawn unto Thee, and to Thee do I cry: enlighten Thou my gloom-enshrouded soul, O Christ, in that Thou alone art compassionate!

Our land is laid waste, our cities have been scorched with the fire of sin, foreigners are devouring our country, and it is devastated and brought low by alien men; yet by thine entreaties, O most blessed father Bessarion, allay the wrath of God and move Him to have mercy on us all.

If the Lord of hosts had not left us His favored ones as advocates, we would have perished like Sodom, and like Gomorra would have fallen victim to the fire of eternal torment; for we know, O

greatly merciful Christ, that it is at the supplications of Thy just ones that Thou sufferest our unrighteousness. Wherefore, at the entreaties of the holy Bessarion pour forth Thy mercy upon us.

Let us increase our prayers, O ye people! For, lo! the supplication of the new hieromartyr, which assisteth our repentance, is able to accomplish much; for through his intercession we receive strength, and by the outpouring of his prayers our souls are filled with light.

Theotokion: Darkness hath congealed in our hearts, and we have none other hope than thee, O most pure Virgin. Wherefore, we call upon thine ineffable maternal goodness: Grant correction to us all before the end!

ODE VI

Irmos: O Christ Master, still Thou the sea of the passions which rageth with a soul-destroying tempest, and lead me up from corruption, in that Thou art compassionate.

In the groves of trees the infidels seized thee and strove to compel thee to deny Christ, thinking that by many tortures they might suborn thee, the pastor and teacher of piety; yet thou didst put the demons to shame by the power of the Cross, and by grace divine didst endure the cruelest of torments to the end.

"Flee ye to the mountains, my children! For, lo! the prince of this world cometh to plunder the inheritance of Christ! But, as your pastor and father, I shall go to our mighty God, to pray for all who have followed me with love." O all-wondrous lover of Christ, our comforter and father, leave us not orphans to the end!

O father Bessarion, great athlete of the Bulgarian race, lift up to God thy fervent entreaty for us, that we may in nowise depart from Him, but that, suffering long amid tribulations, we may reap the fruits of faith in joy as thou dost intercede for us.

Theotokion: O Ever-virgin Theotokos, joy of the angels and consolation of mortals, ask forgiveness of sins for those who hymn thee, and be merciful to thy servants, for thou art the sure refuge of the persecuted and the hope of the desperate, O all-blessed one.

Kontakion, in Tone V—

Thou didst not forsake thy little flock amid temptations, but wast a pillar of confirmation for the faithful amid evil circumstances; and, valiantly enduring the mockery and tortures of the tormentors, thou didst remain faithful to Christ God unto the end, and hast received a crown of glory in His heavenly kingdom, O Bessarion, our all-wondrous father. Wherefore, unceasingly entreat Christ our God in behalf of all who honor thee with all their heart.

Ikos: Possessed of angelic love for Christ, and having planted in the garden of thy soul the all-beauteous roses of faith, hope and love, amid tortures thou wast shown to be a glorious runner in the race of God, a goodly victor over the wiles of the devil, and a helper of the Bulgarians amid the darkness of the yoke of slavery. Wherefore, O Bessarion, our right laudable father, accept from us, who are weak in faith, feeble in hope and lacking in love, this hymnody: Rejoice, all-radiant star of faith; rejoice, rose of piety! Rejoice, thou who wast long-suffering amid tortures; rejoice, impregnable bulwark for those who are shaken! Rejoice, good shepherd; rejoice, confirmation of the faithful! Rejoice, holy adornment of Mount Rhodope; rejoice, sure advocate of the land of Bulgaria! Rejoice, O hieromartyr Bessarion, fervent intercessor for our souls!

ODE VII

Irmos: The supremely exalted Lord of our fathers quenched the flame and bedewed the children, who sang together: Blessed art Thou, O God!

Thou didst stand unmoved amid the waves of the arrogance of the infidels, and wast shown to be an island of rock for thy tempest-tossed children, O all-glorious Bessarion, crying out to Christ: Blessed art Thou, O God!

Thus didst thou exhort thy children, O all-praised father: "Fear not the Moslems who now attack the life of Christians, O my people; for your tribulation shall last not more than ten days. Be ye faithful even unto death, and ye shall receive imperishable crowns in paradise, chanting unto Christ: Blessed art Thou, O God!"

Thou didst shine forth in the Mountains of Rhodope like a radiant beam, and didst disperse the darkness of the delusion of Islam. Thou didst drown the hordes of the wicked in thy blood, and didst teach the faithful to chant: Blessed art Thou, O God!

Theotokion: All earthly things are like dream; all pleasure is ashes! For the Judge shall come without warning, and where then shall we find ourselves? Delay not in thy meditations, O Mistress, and on the dread day stand before us who chant unto thy Son: Blessed art Thou, O God!

ODE VIII

Irmos: The children, forming a universal chorus in the furnace, chanted to Thee, the Creator of all: Hymn the Lord, all ye works, and exalt Him supremely for all ages!

Thy people lamented when the bestial Moslems fell upon them; but, putting aside all fear of man, thou didst soar above them like an eagle, O holy hierarch.

They went up into the Mountains of Rhodope like does fleeing from wild boars; and as a wondrous luminary thou wast to them a guide unto the mountain torrents of everlasting life.

Dragged through the streets of the city of Smolyan by the ungodly ones, stabbed with knives until thy body was riddled and thy bones laid bare, thou didst bedew the soil of Bulgaria with thy sacred blood.

Theotokion: In giving birth to the all-beginningless Light, thou wast shown to be a receptacle of the Light; wherefore, accept the hymnody of those who glorify thee in the land of Bulgaria, and grant us thy radiant aid.

ODE IX

Irmos: Rejoice, O Isaiah! The Virgin hath conceived in her womb and borne a Son, Immanuel, both God and man. Orient is His name; and, magnifying Him, we call the Virgin blessed.

For a people without hope thou wast like a shadow in the burning heat of noonday, and for the oppressed thou wast like a dew-laden cloud on an arid day, O good pastor Bessarion.

When thy children hid themselves in the forests of Rhodope, thou didst make their timid hearts steadfast with wise discourse and courageous acts, O sacred father, blessed Bessarion.

Arrayed in glory, thou standest before the sun-like throne of the Trinity, from whence, like another sun, thou shinest upon the land of Bulgaria and warmest the hearts of those who honor thee with love.

Theotokion: By thy mighty protection keep us ever unharmed by the assaults of the enemy, O all-pure Theotokos; for, after God, it is thee whom we have acquired as our only refuge amid perils.

Exapostilarion: Spec. Mel.: "Hearken, ye women..."—

With love let us now hymn the holy hierarchy among the martyrs, who hath sanctified the land of Bulgaria by his suffering, and hath radiantly illumined the hearts of the faithful with his feast.

Glory..., Now & ever...: Theotokion—

Having assembled in the church of the new-hieromartyr Bessarion, O all-pure Mother of the Light, we, the faithful, pray: Pour thou the light of the knowledge of God into our souls!

On the Praises, 4 stichera, in Tone VIII: Spec. Mel.: "O all-glorious wonder..."—

O all-glorious wonder! Today we glorify a new helper of the Bulgarian land! O father Bessarion, radiant beauty of holy hierarchs, thou glory of the new-martyrs, enlighten our hearts, O luminary! Tend thy little flock, O good shepherd! Help and protect from all evil those who hymn thee with compunction!

O all-glorious wonder! Wandering in the Mountains of Rhodope thou didst find the heavenly homeland, and on the chariot of thy blood thou didst ascend thereto. Us who have wandered from the image of glory do thou hasten to lead to Christ, the

primal Light, where thou shinest, illumined with never-waning light, and by thy supplications intercede for the salvation of those who honor thee.

O all-glorious wonder! The sword of the tormentor openeth the gates of paradise, the malice of the mighty worketh the salvation of a weak old man, torrents of blood pour forth the milk of everlasting joy, a spectacle of mockery buyeth glory, and unbelief strengtheneth the true Faith! Truly wondrous is God in His saints, by whose supplications He saveth those who honor them! Wherefore, we flee to thee with faith, O father Bessarion.

O all-glorious wonder! The Turkish Yoke was shown to be an abundant harvest, wherein Orthodox princes together with simple folk were ground like wheat and offered unto the Lord as bread most sweet at the hands of the Moslems. Thus, O all-wondrous father Bessarion, Christ hath given thee like life-bearing grass unto those who hunger for salvation.

Glory..., in Tone VI—

Even though the Moslems, breathing evil, covered thy body with cruel wounds and shed thy blood in rivers, yet didst thou valiantly drain the cup of tortures to the dregs, making the Mountains of Rhodope an altar unto God, where thou didst offer thyself up to Christ as an unblemished sacrifice and didst sanctify the land of Bulgaria. Wherefore, thou now offerest up to the dread Judge, as a sacrifice of compunction, the supplications of those who splendidly celebrate thy memorial and earnestly sing the praises of thy struggles.

Now & ever...: Theotokion—

O Theotokos, thou art the true vine who hast budded forth for us the Fruit of life. Entreat Him with our venerable father Tikhon and all the saints, we pray thee, O Mistress, that our souls find mercy.

Great Doxology. Troparia. Litanies. Dismissal. First Hour.

AT LITURGY

On the Beatitudes, 8 troparia: 4 from Ode III and 4 from Ode VI.

Prokimenon, in Tone VIII—

The saints shall boast in glory, and they shall rejoice upon their beds.

Stichos: Sing unto the Lord a new song; His praise is in the church of the saints.

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS, §334

Brethren: Remember those who have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation: Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited those who have been occupied therein. We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His

name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Alleluia, in Tone II—

Stichos: Thy priests shall be clothed with righteousness, and Thy righteous shall rejoice.

Stichos: For the Lord hath elected Sion, He hath chosen her to be a habitation for Himself.

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW, §36

The Lord said to His disciples: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for My sake, for a testimony against them and the gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father Who speaketh in you. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake: but he who endureth to the end shall be saved."

Communion hymn—

In everlasting remembrance shall the righteous be; he shall not be afraid of evil tidings.

AKATHIST HYMN
to the
HOLY HIEROMARTYR BESSARION OF SMOLYAN
WHOSE MEMORY THE HOLY CHURCH CELEBRATES ON THE 29TH OF JULY

KONTAKION I

To the chosen confessor and glorious hieromartyr of the Church of Bulgaria, who from every danger doth deliver those who glorify his memory, we now send up hymnody of praise with all our heart: As thou hast boldness before the Lord, free us from all manner of misfortunes, that we may cry out to thee:

Rejoice, our father Bessarion, glorious hieromartyr of the Bulgarian people!

IKOS I

The angelic armies were amazed, beholding thee overcoming bodily sufferings even while thou wast clad in the flesh, O valiant passion-bearer Bessarion; for as a fellow-laborer with the right victorious martyrs, having finished the sacred race with the shedding of thy blood, thou wast shown to be a friend of the angels. And enrolled in the army of the heavenly hosts, thou hearest from mortals such praises as these:

Rejoice, Rejoice, newly-revealed star of the Bulgarian land;
rejoice, constant advocate for our race!
Rejoice, pride of faithful Bulgarians;
rejoice, adornment of the Orthodox Church!
Rejoice, thou who dwellest in heaven with the righteous;
rejoice, mighty champion of the Holy Faith!
Rejoice, thou who didst put to shame the counsel of the ungodly Moslems;
rejoice, thou who didst show thyself to be a true model of the virtues!
Rejoice, thou who by the Moslems wast led naked through the city of Smolyan;
rejoice, thou who for Christ's sake didst drain to the dregs their cup of mockery!
Rejoice, thou who with thy blood didst weave for thyself a robe of purple;
rejoice, thou who in the heavens art arrayed in most splendid linen!

Rejoice, our father Bessarion, glorious hieromartyr of the Bulgarian people!

KONTAKION II

Seeing that a multitude of infidels was coming to force them to renounce the Christian Faith, the inhabitants of the city of Smolyan, together with Bessarion their bishop, went up onto the Mountain of Rhodope and hid themselves in caves, thereby providing a foretype of the faithful of the last times, who will hide from dread persecution, that in secret they might chant unto the all-seeing God: Alleluia!

IKOS II

Perceiving thee to be a good and faithful shepherd embracing all with thy love, the people of Smolyan were strengthened and rendered steadfast, that they might faithfully preserve the Orthodox Faith; and with fervor they cried out to thee thus:
Rejoice, O our good shepherd;
rejoice, teacher of faith and piety!
Rejoice, thou who wast unafraid of the reason-endowed lions' whelps;
rejoice, thou who didst arm thy faithful children with courage!
Rejoice, thou who wast born in the lamentable time of Turkish enslavement;
rejoice, thou who didst love the heavenly homeland more than that on earth!
Rejoice, thou who didst entrust thy whole life unto Christ God;
rejoice, thou who didst valiantly finish thine earthly course!
Rejoice, healing spring of Mount Rhodope;
rejoice, advocate of all Bulgaria!
Rejoice, thick forest shading thy children from the burning heat of false belief;
rejoice, cloud moistening the pasture of men's hearts with noetic rain!
Rejoice, our father Bessarion, glorious hieromartyr of the Bulgarian people!

KONTAKION III

The power of the Most High overshadowed thee, and thy heart leapt up with love for Christ; wherefore, knowing that we must not only believe, but must lay down our life for Him Who was crucified for us, even amid thy very sufferings thou didst chant to our Savior: Alleluia!

IKOS III

Possessing unshakable faith in divine help, with innocence and meekness thou didst confound the savagery of the Moslems, wisely showing forth the correction of love as the crown of all the virtues; wherefore, O Bessarion all glorious and wondrous, accept from us this meager hymnody:

Rejoice, mediator of joy for those who joyously greet thee;
rejoice, fervent advocate for all who honor thee with love!
Rejoice, thou who didst plant a field of piety in the wilderness of Rhodope;
rejoice, thou who hast sanctified the city of Smolyan with thy sacred blood!
Rejoice, all-wondrous rose of the land of Bulgaria;
rejoice, good comforter of the sorrowful!
Rejoice, thou who didst show the streets of Smolyan to be the threshold of paradise;
rejoice, thou who through thy martyr's blood didst find the promised land!
Rejoice, thou who wast of one mind with the martyrs of old;
rejoice, for thy loins were filled with mockings for Christ's sake!
Rejoice, thou who didst endure cruel sufferings of the flesh to the end;
rejoice, all-wondrous athlete of our race!
Rejoice, our father Bessarion, glorious hieromartyr of the Bulgarian people!

KONTAKION IV

Grievously battered by the storms of the sea of life, we hasten to thee now amid our griefs and sicknesses, O Bessarion our father, that thou mightest show forth thy kind and fatherly care for us, the unworthy, who for thy sake chant unto God: Alleluia!

IKOS IV

The Lord caused thy corrections to be heard of all throughout the land of Bulgaria, O hieromartyr Bessarion, and by the record thereof He hath accounted us worthy to celebrate thy splendid memorial and to chant joyously before thine icon this hymnody:

Rejoice, greatly hymned passion-bearer of our nation;
rejoice, morning-star of the never-waning day!
Rejoice, faithful intercessor for the flock of Rhodope in time of its captivity;
rejoice, mighty intercessor for us also in these latter times!
Rejoice, invincible warrior of Orthodoxy;
rejoice, treasure of our land, which cannot be stolen from us!
Rejoice, thou who didst rebuke the uncircumcised hearts of the circumcised;
rejoice, thou who hast shown thyself to be a brilliant beacon for the Bulgarians!
Rejoice, for amid thy torments thou wast ground like wheat;
rejoice, for thou didst soar aloft to Christ like a bird!
Rejoice, thou who wast lacerated and maimed by the knives of the Moslems;
rejoice, thou who madest Mount Rhodope a vineyard of goodly vines!
Rejoice, our father Bessarion, glorious hieromartyr of the Bulgarian people!

KONTAKION V

Thou wast shown to be a divinely guided star of the Bulgarian race, having made of Mount Rhodope an altar where, having offered thyself up to Christ as a right acceptable sacrifice, thou didst mount the heavens like the stars, chanting unto God with love: Alleluia!

IKOS V

Seeing that thou didst treat tortures and laceration as nought, the infidels were exceeding wroth, and having stripped thee naked, they stoned thee with stones, beat thee with rods of iron, set a red-hot brazier upon thy head, and then, unable to bear thy patience, ran thy chest through with a sword and

mutilated and broke thy body: yet by so doing, even though they did not wish it, they glorified thy soul forever. Wherefore, thou now hearest from the faithful such things as these:

Rejoice, vessel of wisdom sublime;
rejoice, dove who takest wing through the heavens!
Rejoice, eagle of golden pinions, soaring above the city of Smolyan;
rejoice, divinely melodious nightingale gladdening Mount Rhodope!
Rejoice, sweet-sounding harp of the Holy Spirit;
rejoice, lark who hast escaped the pursuit of the enemy!
Rejoice, lamb who shut the mouths of lions;
rejoice, thou who with humble endurance didst break the teeth of wild beasts!
Rejoice, thou who illuminest the faithful;
rejoice, arrow wounding the soul-destroying serpent!
Rejoice, thou who didst put on the breast-plate of righteousness;
rejoice, thou who didst thereby set at nought the wiles of the Moslems!
Rejoice, our father Bessarion, glorious hieromartyr of the Bulgarian people!

KONTAKION VI

Even after death thou art a proclaimer of the Truth, brightly emitting the light of the Gospel for all who seek salvation, like a beacon lighted upon a mountain. Wherefore, we beseech thee, O allwondrous Bessarion, that thou illumine also our souls, that for thy sake we may cry out to God with radiant voices: Alleluia!

IKOS VI

Having shone forth amid the gloomy vale of the five-century enslavement of our race, thou dost illumine the whole land of Bulgaria from Mount Rhodope, which later became a place of martyrdom sanctified by the relics of our fathers and mothers who suffered at the hands of the Turks; for there thy sacred bones lie hidden, O our father who art glorified by these hymns:

Rejoice, thou who didst show forest glades to be temples of the living God;
rejoice, thou who wast thyself a true temple of God!

Rejoice, instructor in repentance and meekness;
rejoice, witness and confessor of the Truth!
Rejoice, thou who didst sanctify the streets of the city of Smolyan with thy steps;
rejoice, mighty pillar of the Orthodox Faith!
Rejoice, defender and help of orphans;
rejoice, feeder and giver of shelter to the poor!
Rejoice, swift physician of the ailing;
rejoice, uplifter of the downcast and despondent;
Rejoice, thou who didst show the place of thy martyrdom to be a bridal-chamber;
rejoice, thou who for Christ's sake didst consider thy nakedness to be vesture!
Rejoice, our father Bessarion, glorious hieromartyr of the Bulgarian people!

KONTAKION VII

When the Lord will come to judge the living and the dead, O sacred new-martyr of the Bulgarian race, grant that by thy supplications we may make a good and irresistible answer; and show thou the inexpressible mercy of Christ to be well inclined toward us, that in thanksgiving we may for thy sake cry out to God: Alleluia!

IKOS VII

In latter times thou didst shine forth anew on Mount Rhodope, O luminary, and like a celestial flower adorning the mountains of paradise, thou hast become the longed-for confirmation of the desperate, the consolation of the troubled and the joy of the suffering; wherefore, be thou a protector for us who honor thee with faith, that we may ever praise thee thus:

Rejoice, thou who didst strengthen those who were driven into the mountains;
rejoice, thou who dost lead to Christ those astray in the forest of vanity!
Rejoice, adornment of passion-bearers;
rejoice, thou who puttest the noetic foe to shame!

Rejoice, comforter of the disturbed;
rejoice, calm haven for those who are
tormented!

Rejoice, thou who wast not afraid of those who
slay the body;

rejoice, thou who didst utterly love him who
saveth men's souls!

Rejoice, sacred minister of the King of heaven;
rejoice, faithful advocate for the Bulgarian race!

Rejoice, unwithering pasturage of our land;
rejoice, fortress for those who are beset by the
adversary!

Rejoice, our father Bessarion, glorious
hieromartyr of the Bulgarian people!

KONTAKION VIII

Considering life on earth to be but a sojourn,
and holding transitory things to be as nought, thou
didst wholly cleave unto Christ, O Bessarion our
father; wherefore, for thee death was gain, and thy
final breath bore to sweetest Jesus the song: Alleluia!

IKOS VIII

Let the whole city of Smolyan rejoice today,
and let all the land of Bulgaria join chorus, for
Bessarion, this new-hieromartyr of Christ, is
adorned with astral radiance amid the angelic
ranks, and entreateth the Savior, that He turn not
His face away from those who chant thus to His
saint:

Rejoice, thou who didst endure cruel tortures
for Christ;

rejoice, thou who wast broken by the Moslems
with iron implements!

Rejoice, thou who amid terrible tortures didst
gain release from the flesh;

rejoice, thou who straightway thereafter didst
taste of ineffable joy!

Rejoice, crucible of trials presenting a foretype
of those at the end of time;

rejoice, safe hiding-place for faithful in the time
of the Antichrist!

Rejoice, protector of the flock of Smolyan;

rejoice, thou who carest for our country!

Rejoice, angel of the Mountains of Rhodope;

rejoice, preëminent among the new-martyrs of
those parts!

Rejoice, staff of strength for the weak;
rejoice, mighty tower of the Church of
Bulgaria!

Rejoice, our father Bessarion, glorious
hieromartyr of the Bulgarian people!

KONTAKION IX

O Christ our God, every drop of Bessarion's
blood was a precious pearl, a dewy delight for the
land, the watering of the forest trees, and for those
who love the martyrs a spur to zeal, and the greatest
love, which is to die for Christ, for those who chant
unto Thee for all: Alleluia!

IKOS IX

To worldly orators the renunciation of the flesh
is incomprehensible; for, loving carnal-
mindedness, they reject the wisdom of the Gospel
and everywhere seek worldly filth, unable with
those who celebrate the memory of Bessarion to
chant to the newly revealed martyr such things as
these:

Rejoice, thou who didst make unto God an
offering for the faithful of Smolyan;

rejoice, thou who didst put to shame the bes-
tiality of the Moslems!

Rejoice, thou who to the end didst care for thy
children;

rejoice, thou who didst remain in the Orthodox
Faith until death!

Rejoice, thou who dost accompany wayfarers;
rejoice, helmsman of those who sail the sea!

Rejoice, path for those lost in the valleys;
rejoice, farewell for those in their deathbeds!

Rejoice, glory of the Church of the East;

rejoice, joy of the Bulgarian race!

Rejoice, sacrifice of sweet savor for God Most
High;

rejoice, radiant favorite of Christ, the Creator
of light!

Rejoice, our father Bessarion, glorious
hieromartyr of the Bulgarian people!

KONTAKION X

Desiring to save thy soul, thou didst surrender
thy body to the torturers, saying: "He who loveth
the divine Truth is unshakable in faith, and in the

sight of God my death will render me immortal!" Wherefore, thou hast saved thy body and soul in the age to come, and dost chant with beauty unto our God: Alleluia!

IKOS X

Thou art a bulwark of the Church of Bulgaria, and for all who honor thee art before God a mediator, together with the two hundred passion-bearers of Mount Raikovo and all the new martyrs of Mount Rhodope, with whom do thou accept from us such laudation:

Rejoice, radiant beam for us amid the gloom of despondency;
rejoice, unvanquished champion of Christ!
Rejoice, thou who didst manfully triumph over the hordes of the demons;
rejoice, thou who hast splendidly gladdened the multitudes of the angels!
Rejoice, helper of our homeland;
rejoice, humiliation of the enemies of the Orthodox Church!
Rejoice, secret helper of those who call upon thee in secret;
rejoice, manifest joy of those who glorify thee in thy church!
Rejoice, indestructible rampart of the city of Smolyan;
rejoice, thou who walkest out every evil from those who honor thee!
Rejoice, dweller with monks;
rejoice, companion of spiritual athletes!
Rejoice, our father Bessarion, glorious hieromartyr of the Bulgarian people!

KONTAKION XI

Glorifying the right valorous Bessarion with hymnody, let us strive also to emulate his patience, for Christ's sake considering all things to be but dung, accepting tribulations and afflictions with good cheer, giving thanks for all things and abiding in prayer, that with him we also may be vouchsafed to chant to God triumphally in paradise: Alleluia!

IKOS XI

O radiant priest of the true God, tire not in thy supplications for thy homeland and those who

hymn thee, lest the abyss of the all-iniquitous world do us to death, or we be swallowed up in the pit of sin; but having clothed ourselves in robes of blamelessness, we chant to thee with joy:

Rejoice, sweet branch of the vine of heaven;
rejoice, right fruitful scion of Bulgaria!
Rejoice, thou who didst splendidly clothe thyself in a robe of blood;
rejoice, thou who didst purify thyself of the stain of sin!
Rejoice, thou who in thy torments didst make thyself whiter than snow;
rejoice, thou who art more fragrant than the flowers of spring!
Rejoice, bird of heaven who madest thy nest on Mount Rhodope;
rejoice, rose of the mountains, bedewed by the Holy Spirit!
Rejoice, chosen building-block of the house of God;
rejoice, thou who wast crushed to death for the sake of the Lord!
Rejoice, thou whose body was broken further even after death!
rejoice, thou who straightway thereafter camest to dwell in the bridal-chamber of Christ!
Rejoice, our father Bessarion, glorious hieromartyr of the Bulgarian people!

KONTAKION XII

Thou art a fervent mediator for those who desire to acquire grace from God, O right laudable Bessarion our father, and by thy supplications thou now workest miracles for the faithful; wherefore, joining together in chorus for song, we all bow down before thee as to one divinely chosen from among the Bulgarian people, chanting unto God: Alleluia!

IKOS XII

Hymning the sufferings thou didst endure for Christ, we bring thee an offering of prayer, O thou who carest for our race; and in these dark times we have thee, and all the new-martyrs of the land of Bulgaria, as a leader and pastor, a sacred lamp and a loving father; wherefore, never forsake those who sing to thee thus:

Rejoice, light for us amid the gloomy vale of sin;
 rejoice, ship for those foundering amid the
 waves of life!
 Rejoice, staff for those in peril amid torrents of
 temptations;
 rejoice, liberator of those held in thrall by the
 passions!
 Rejoice, comforter of those who weep;
 rejoice, protector of mothers!
 Rejoice, nurturer of children;
 rejoice, keeper of the young!
 Rejoice, thou who guardest the faithful against
 the ungodliness of these times;
 rejoice, thou who wardest thy children away
 from the snares of this most deceptive world!

Rejoice, bestower of calm upon those imperiled
 by storms;
 rejoice, guide to the path of salvation for those
 who call upon thee!
 Rejoice, our father Bessarion, glorious
 hieromartyr of the Bulgarian people!

KONTAKION XIII

O most valiant Bessarion, hieromartyr of the
 Bulgarian race, who didst withstand cruel tor-
 tures for Christ and wast a lamb slaughtered for
 God Whom thou didst love: Accept now these
 our present meager praises, and deliver from
 everlasting torments those who cry out to thee:
 Alleluia!

This kontakion is recited thrice, whereupon Ikos I and Kontakion I are repeated.

PRAYER TO THE HOLY HIEROMARTYR BESSARION, BISHOP OF SMOLYAN

O all-wondrous and valiant hieromartyr of our
 race, new boast of the land of Bulgaria and
 adornment of the Orthodox Church, who didst
 shine forth in the days of our enslavement to the
 Moslems: Illumine us with rays of piety, and free
 us from the bonds of sin. O thou who ascended
 Mount Rhodope for the salvation of thy flock,
 lift up our hearts to the heights of Sion, the
 heights of divine knowledge and a right under-
 standing. O thou who in caves hiddest thyself
 from the infidels, protect us from the most
 wicked enemy of the kingdom of Christ, who
 cometh to deceive, if possible, even the elect. O
 good shepherd, tend thou thy nation, which is
 being led into the abyss by blind hirelings; and
 show now thy care for the humble sheep of
 Christ, who have been harried and scattered, as
 ones bereft of a shepherd. Hearken unto our
 groaning, attend unto our sighs, and behold our
 tears. And beseech our greatly merciful God,

Who of old enlightened the Bulgarian people with
 the seven luminaries, that He light for us new
 lamps, that He suppress the darkness of igno-
 rance, heresies and errors, and shine upon our
 much-suffering land the rich rays of righteousness
 and piety. Yea, O our right laudable and good
 father, we ardently beseech thee with tears, that
 the light of the knowledge of God, the right Faith,
 and piety may shine forth in our nation; that the
 rain of the lovingkindness of God may be poured
 forth on our land; that, rendered chaste by thine
 intercessions and those of all the new-martyrs of
 our people, we may be seen to burn up the thorns
 of sin and cultivate the roses of the virtues in the
 meadow of our homeland, that future genera-
 tions, receiving the goodly inheritance of the Holy
 Faith from us, the unworthy, may also glorify our
 true King and Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, with
 His Father and all-holy Spirit, now and ever, and
 unto the ages of ages. Amen.

PAST PRESENT

A great deal of what we read or hear or see concerning the Orthodox Church is from the past, be it the translation of a saint's life or writings, time-honored rituals or an icon dating back to some distant era. This makes some people wonder what all this has to do with them here and now. After all, we don't live in the Byzantine Empire, Holy Russia or any other foreign country and culture of the past; why can't Orthodox Christianity be up-to-date?

In order to find the answers to such questions, we have to understand the questions themselves; this means figuring out what it is we really want to know.

Some people simply want to see how long we will continue hanging on to such "vestiges of the past"; they expect us to learn from them; their minds are made up. If they happen to read this, that is their problem.

Many of us are caught between powerful forces uprooting us from the past and showing us into an uncertain future on one side, and deep-set traditions and values and reverence for the past on another. There is nothing new about such tensions; time has never been known to stand still, even when power failures stopped the electronic timing devices. But we do live in a society where these tensions are very keenly felt, if not needlessly exaggerated.

Olympic athletes are constantly breaking the old records of former champions. Technology in many areas is out-dating itself so rapidly the experts have trouble keeping up. Demographics tell us there are more people in the world than ever before and, like it or not, many more are expected. This led one enthusiastic preacher to exclaim, "More people are being born than are being born again!"

Again, this is hardly a new problem; but bombarded by "bigger and better", "new and improved", "up-dated", "state of the art" and their unstated premise of man-made progress, Orthodoxy's preoccupation with the past can appear irrelevant and pusillanimous, if not worse. Living in the New World, where traditional values

have to take root in a melting pot—or on an arid reservation—makes American Orthodoxy all the more challenging.

First of all, we might ask our imaginary interlocutor weaving through the smog and rush-hour traffic on his solar-powered moped to the throbbing rhythms of the most popular song of the week, where he thinks he would be if some unknown character of the shady past had not invented the wheel?

Making intelligent use of what other people learned in the past is one of the traits of civilization, a quality that makes a man a bit different from a beast.

If this applies to acquiring some basic skills for living in this world, perhaps it can also help us learn how to live a better life or become better persons.

Making intelligent use of such discoveries as the wheel or that $1+1=2$ is not unrelated to less tangible lessons acquired from, say, works of art collected from other times and places. The Orthodox Church is not just a museum, although some people may view it as one. Learning to profit from the divinely revealed truths treasured here involves special skills. Who will teach us?

In many ways the modern world is a kind of negative or reversed view of Christianity. The self-aggrandizing syndrome of constantly setting new records and generating progress is a case in point. The New Testament gives a very different picture of where mankind and civilization are going, and the ultimate catastrophe depicted there haunts the entire world as we prepare to end the 20th century.

A moment's reflection is sufficient to uncover some of the reasons why the Orthodox Church is not awarding gold and silver medals for record performances.

On the other hand, endless exceptional feats have been accomplished through the love of Christ and they have not gone unrewarded even in this world. The accounts and writings of the saints, the hymns that extol them, the icons that portray them—all these are, if you will, windows into this reality.

The fact that they occurred at other times and in far-off places makes them all the more relevant to us here and now. Biblical truths are not confined to one place and culture. The accounts of the Old Testament embrace the full gamut of recorded history before Christ and a long list of various peoples, cultures and movements. The New Testament Church spread from the Upper Room in Jerusalem to the farthest corners of the earth and human history, involving people of every imaginable social status, age, background, culture, environment, etc.—plus a few that defy even the most imaginative. Perhaps we should catch the subtle hint that what has produced such sacred fruit everywhere else might work for us as well?

Following the instructions turns out to involve more than the naked curiosity, however. Cooperating with the saving grace of God to become a real Christian is a life-consuming struggle. Once engaged, we quickly discover the need to learn from others' successful struggles, to draw on their strength and experience.

Plugging into a data bank that can not only signal back to us how to resolve our frustrations but also give us the strength to follow through may sound a bit far-fetched, but in fact is just one of the discomforting facts of life. The treasury of the Church, transcending both centuries and cultures, offers an abundance of "success stories". Many popular new movements and ideas cannot afford

to be preoccupied with the past simply because it raises questions which many people may not be eager to answer and which some people are unable to answer; they really don't remember. Our attitude towards the past says a lot about our attitude towards ourselves and towards the future. Hiding, playing games, applying a set of criteria, we confine ourselves to the here and now.

In Christ, we not only learn from the past but from the future as well. In fact, the Orthodox Church has been accused of being preoccupied with the future, with the Kingdom yet to come, to the extent that it is irrelevant or worse. For as Christ is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, both the past and the future, He also proclaims, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age" [Mt 28:20]. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I." In the midst of the particles of light we see twinkling in the darkness, there are some which may have been emitted by a distant star hundreds or thousands or millions of years ago. The present and the past are not that easily separated. Why not, then, turn our eyes to the spiritual firmament of the Church, to the rays of the light of Christ extended to us from the saints and righteous of all times and places, even to the Sun of Righteousness Himself.

— Hieromonk Ioannikios

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